Start of [Minutes of the meeting of the officers of the American Federation].

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
OFFICERS OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION HISTORY PROJECT

January 30, 1992; 3:00-4:45 P.M.

Held at the Offices of the
American Federation

Present: Hermann Teifer, Historian

Rabbi Robert L. Lehman, Curt C. Silberman,
Herbert A. Strauss, Albert U. Tietz,
Fritz Weinschenk, Stephen Wertheimer,
Franz Winkler

Staff: Katherine Rosenthal, Dennis E. Rohrbaugh

Rabbi Robert L. Lehman opened the meeting on the American Federation history project at 3:00 P.M., thanking everyone for their attendance and support. By way of introduction, he stated that the abstract of the history of the Federation by Dr. Hermann Teifer, which was distributed at the Federation's 50th Anniversary Luncheon held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel,* had been well received, but that additional and different ideas had developed concerning certain aspects of Dr. Teifer's work. Rabbi Lehman asked Dr. Strauss to lead the discussion.

Those present used the occasion for a friendly exchange of views on the paper at hand, which represents an abstract as presented by the author to the anniversary meeting of the Federation. It is not a complete report on the entire body of materials available for use by Dr. Teifer from the files, from interviews, and from personal conversations for example with Dr. Silberman. As to overall design, the paper closes rather abruptly with the 1960s, so that the last 25 years are quite inadequately covered. The Federation history, as pointed out by Dr. Teifer, was to occupy a middle ground between a Vereinsgeschichte and the history of the German Jewish immigration and its organizations. Being a coordinating agency, several layers of organizational activity were to be included. Organizations closest to the Federation are U.R.O., the Jewish Philanthropic Fund of 1933, and the Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration. The Federation also founded United Help and channelled German funds through it to social agencies in many parts of the United States. The writing of the Federation's history allows for the observation of German-Jewish attitudes at work: the Federation represents the organizational history of German-Jews, as linked by Dr. Teifer with the Reichsvertretung, some of whose delegates were active in founding and directing the Federation.

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*At the outset of the meeting, President Lehman presented a financial accounting of the Luncheon which indicated a net debit of $300.00.

Comments pointed out that the intensive efforts made by the Federation to assist organizations and policies aiming at the liberalization of immigration law long after the German-Jewish emergency had passed were not mentioned clearly in the paper. Equally, the cooperation of the Federation with other immigrant groups such as the Council of Jews from Germany appeared underplayed: their description might be centered around the main lines of activity such as immigration efforts, Wiedergutmachung and Jewish policies, German issues, cultural presence, cooperation with other Jewish organizations in the United States, including those of Holocaust survivors. The files contain rich materials on the many-tiered and selfless efforts made by Federation officals to advance the interest not only of our own group, but of others as well. Federation officals lobbied in Washington for positive Israel policies; they helped survivor organizations from Eastern Europe (and less successfully from Austria) to present their claims in public meetings and through intercessions at the German consulates. The links with the German agencies, while generally positive, reflected also the adversary relationship in political and Wiedergutmachung demands that needed attention. Thus the Federation held joint meetings on such issues as the statute of limitations for war crimes indictments, and cooperated with the Council Presidium (on which it is represented) on numerous troubling issues concerning post-war German politics and events especially of an antisemitic nature.

In the area of Wiedergutmachung the Federation's activities were described as considerably broader and more continuous than appeared in the abstract. Here too consuls proved helpful but Bonn authorities reluctant. The adversary aspects of the relationship, that is the obstructions of the Bonn Finance Ministry, are a matter of record. Here U.R.O. files should be consulted, and interviews, arranged possibly with Mrs. Kosterlitz, to obtain the flavor of the many various issues for which the Federation had to fight. (It was pointed out that the files may not include observations on the attitudes of consular officals toward Jewish demands.)

In line with the progress of acculturation, contacts were established between functionaries and representives of American Jewish organizations and personalities as well as intellectuals and our community through the Lerntage. The Lerntage helped to focus on the German-Jewish legacy and its potential role in American Jewish life. They also served to convey the unity of the Federation with American Jewish organizations to the German consular officals attending them regularly. Through the Research Foundation, the German-Jewish immigration to the United States and beyond has gained its place in the collective memory of Jewish as well as general history: its impact on publicity and the media in Germany and elsewhere continues to be felt, and many serious scholarly projects have been owed to the work of the Research Foundation, particularly its Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés prepared jointly with the Institut für Zeitgeschichte.

Finally, the Federation in its efforts at "moral restitution" has been quite involved in securing funds for Russian émigrés and for refugees unable to meet the required deadlines: the files contain or should contain information on the close cooperation of the Federation with Nahum Goldmann, the Federation's activities with the Claims Conference and its secretary Saul Kagan, the allocation of funds from the "Goldmann Fund" to German-Jewish social agencies. Here, a recent book by Professor Ernst Stiefel and Dr. Frank Mecklenburg was pointed to as additional evidence for the Federation's and for immigrant lawyers' involvement in bonum publicum on many levels.

This being the general drift of the discussion, participants succeeded in pointing out a number of specific issues and proposed avenues that might be fruitfully pursued in developing Dr. Teifer's work further. Technical proposals included adding a biographical appendix and an index for easier use. It was suggested that Dr. Teifer might take out time to consult archives other than the Federation's both here and abroad.

Dr. Teifer in response stressed that he had much more detailed material than appeared in his abstract. He has more material on the period of the 1960s, but did indeed become less specific about events after 1964. This is due in part to the necessity of preparing his material for the Luncheon, but also because the Federation minutes after that date become far less thorough and detailed. Therefore, he will need the help of the Directors for much of the material of this period, and will conduct additional interviews. He has mainly personal recollections to rely upon at this point; for example, material on the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Foundation has come mostly from Rabbi Gruenewald's memory. There are of course great dangers in relying only on people's memories to write a history, archival-source research will have to be undertaken as well. As to the question of Restitution, Dr. Teifer stated that he has more material, but kept it out of the abstract on the advice of Dr. Strauss due to the limited space in an 'abstract' format. Also, much of the legal nature of the material was difficult to master. Mr. Weinschenk recommended asking Dr. Frank Mecklenburg for suggestions. Dr. Strauss said that the issues were not really legal, but matters of politics, ideas, and principle. He further stressed the organizational questions involved. Dr. Silberman said in this context that the Immigrant's Conference, a one-time rival of the Federation, had not been mentioned, notably their war-time project, joined by the Federation, to finance a fighter-plane by donations.

Dr. Teifer said that the discussion had shown that three different histories were possible: the whole German-Jewish immigration of the 1930s, the whole German-Jewish immigration to the United States, or a Vereinsgeschichte-organizational history. The first two options are too broad, the last too narrow--a compromise must be struck. Mr. Tietz said that there was much information in the files for a good organizational history. Dr. Strauss said that community attitudes are embodied by the Federation, and that the files are quite rich with material that can expand the history to broader involvements.

Then Rabbi Lehman raised the question of developing the present abstract further. (A more detailed report of the meeting is being provided to Dr. Teifer.) Dr. Teifer said that in terms of the present contract, nothing more was to be done. He expressed his desire to finish the project as it was now contracted, present it, and determine at that point if there should be additional work. Mr. Tietz said that he agreed, and that the 150 to 180 pages should be the goal at this time. Dr. Silberman stated his feeling that he would not be satisfied with a Vereinsgeschichte, and it should be the start of a more extensive work. The history must be a mirror to reflect what was done by German Jews who immigrated to the United States, to which Mr. Tietz agreed. Dr. Strauss said that the émigré group is dying out, and that this resource should be used now. He said that this history does not actually have to be read--it will serve as a documentation, a record.

Dr. Strauss then asked Dr. Teifer if he intended to incorporate the issues raised at this meeting into his work. Dr. Teifer said yes, he would expand upon such items as the Social Security issue, the Lerntage, the Goldmann Fund. He will return to the files, and add more material from the 1960s to the 1990s. Mr. Tietz asked about the interviews held by the Research Foundation. Dr. Teifer stated that he had used many of them, but that they had limitations for his purpose.

Rabbi Lehman then brought the discussion to a close by stating that a contract exists. Dr. Teifer has requested an additional payment on the $3,000.00 yet remaining to be paid to him for the completed project. Dr. Strauss suggested giving Dr. Teifer $1,000.00 now, and $2,000.00 at the delivery of the final work. Dr. Teifer then asked that the amount be raised to $1,500.00 now, and that $1,500.00 be transferred at the end of the work. After some discussion, this arrangement was agreed upon, and Mr. Weinschenk asked that Dr. Teifer's proposal be accepted by vote of those present, which was done (one abstention).

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 P.M.

TRANSLATION OF REMARKS MADE AT THE RECEPTION
ATTENDED BY THE BOARD OF AND SPONSORED BY THE
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF JEWS FROM CENTRAL EUROPE
IN HONOR OF DR. HEINZ GALINSKI AND MR. MAX WILLNER
ON MARCH 16, 1992, AT LOEWS NEW YORK HOTEL

Rabbi Lehman opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. and warmly welcomed Dr. Galinski and Mr. Willner as representatives of the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland. He stated that we have been continuously learning from each other across the two continents, and he wished them success with their deliberations in the Claims Conference, whose meeting they are attending in New York. The Federation, he said, is honored to tender a warm reception to Dr. Galinski and Mr. Willner.

Rabbi Lehman expressed his gratitude to Messrs. Wollheim and Kagan for having arranged this reception, and to Mrs. Carol Strauss for organizing it in her customarily efficient way.

Then Dr. Silberman as the Chairman of the Board of the American Federation underlined the feelings expressed by Rabbi Lehman and extended a warm welcome to the two leading representatives of the Jews in Germany today. He explained that the American Federation has been a platform and program for the interest of German Jewish émigrés for half a century. It is a coordinating committee whose interest link it with international organizations like the Council of Jews from Germany, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and others. The member organizations have established a network of social and cultural services which have carried on the best of the German-Jewish tradition abroad. However, by serving Nazi victims, whatever their national background or origin, the Federation has discharged its obligation towards Holocaust survivors as well. A major concern of the Federation has been Wiedergutmachung on the political level and through the United Restitution Organization in caring for individuals. The Federation wished to keep this reception intimate in order to facilitate a free exchange of views. In the past, there have been frequent contacts between our groups and Jewish organizations in Germany. Dr. Silberman stated his wish to see Dr. Galinski's visit as the initiation of more intensive contacts in the future, and expressed his best wishes to our guests for the success of their mission in New York.

Next, Mr. Wollheim underlined the cordiality with which those present welcomed our guests: "You are among friends, Heinz and those present represent the elite of our group in New York." Mr. Wollheim then reminisced about the experiences he had shared with our two guests since they had been in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Dr. Galinski and his coworkers, Mr. Wollheim explained, were initially assisted by him to recreate Jewish culture in post-war Germany, establish the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland and buttress Jewish congregations against the many troubles besetting Jews in the post-war world. Dr. Galinski set up the Berlin Jewish Community Center in Fasanenstrasse. He gave Jews a strong political position in the Bundesrepublik and was instrumental in setting up a number of memorials such as the house in which the infamous Wannsee Conference took place in 1942. He has become the most prominent spokesman of Jews in Germany, and thus created effective links between the Jewish Community and the government leadership in Bonn. Recently, his links with Chancellor Kohl and the Ministry of Justice have been most helpful. Significant evidence of his political acumen was the way in which he compensated for the problems created by the late Mr. Werner Nachmann for the Zentralrat; using a "forward defense" he forestalled any possible antisemitic reaction to this catastrophy.

Dr. Galinski, in reply, joined Dr. Silberman and Mr. Wollheim in their desire to continue closer contacts between our groups in the future and to search for a common language.

Dr. Galinski proceeded on a tour d'horizon of the problems with which the Zentralrat and the Berlin Jewish community under his leadership have been confronted during the last two years. Jews in very many countries have not yet fully understood the monumental changes with which we are confronted. In areas which formerly comprised the Soviet Union, latent antisemitism has come to the surface in consequence of Perestroika, and new right-wing groups attract growing support. In the newly united Germany several problems left behind by the defunct G.D.R. had to be dealt with. The Honecker regime, which had refused responsibility for the Holocaust and the need for Wiedergutmachung, had pursued a blatantly anti-Israel policy. The existence of antisemitism

was indicated by the desecration of some cemeteries and by right-wing radical groups like the Skin Heads, now emerging from hiding. The Berlin Jewish community is now united with the East Berlin community, which consisted of about 300 members at the time of the German unification. The Berlin Community now has 9,000 members, a growth of 50% over the last two years. Jews in Germany expect a major wave of immigration from Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and the former Soviet Union). Dr. Galinski's recent visit to Moscow revealed that the German Embassy has 38,000 applications by Jews in Russia for emigration to Germany. This present and future immigration of Eastern European, especially Russian, Jews, has already created major problems. After 70 years of Communist rule the older generation has lost all contact with Jewish religion and culture. Their occupational skills are extremely high, but Dr. Galinski believes that this group may have to be written off as active participants in Jewish life and culture. Jews in Germany provide services and old age homes for a number of these émigrés, but concentrate their major efforts on winning the youth over to a renewed Jewish identity. An extension of the Berlin Jewish School will be opened in the former East Berlin during the next few weeks. Dr. Galinski stressed the primacy of Israel in Jewish political concerns, but regretted the decline of Russian immigration to Israel due to problems of absorbing the frequently professionally trained immigrants. He averred the principle of freedom of immigration, i.e. the right of Russian Jews to settle where they wish, which is, as he noted, not always the view of Israeli politicians.

Finally, Dr. Galinski warned against the visible increase in right-wing extremism in Germany and Western Europe generally. He quoted polls predicting a right-radical vote of about 10% in the forthcoming Baden-Wuerttemberg elections and a considerable gain for LePen's National Front in France (it had attracted 20% of a recent vote in Nice). This corresponds to the right-wing propaganda that Dr. Galinski has been fighting assiduously in Germany for many years. He mentioned Skin Head behavior, the spread of the Auschwitzluege and the import of antisemitic material from Canada and the United States as his major present problems.

Concerning Wiedergutmachung, Dr. Galinski expressed the hope that the New York meeting of the Claims Conference will arrive at an agreement and end any differences of opinion that may have arisen in the past. He has interceded with Chancellor Kohl and other Bonn officials to press for an increase of the number of civil servants processing Wiedergutmachung claims in the German bureaucratic structure. He expressed agreement with the impatience felt world-wide about the slowness of the Restitution and Wiedergutmachung procedures. In view of all these joint concerns, Dr. Galinski reaffirmed the need for close cooperation.

In view of the limited time available, relatively few questions could be addressed to Dr. Galinski following his remarks (Dr. Weinschenk acting as translator). They concerned the question of Jewish culture and life in Germany and the apparent irrational discrepancy between the number of Jews that used to live in the former G.D.R. and the grandiose expenditure of public funds to rebuild synagogues that are not even able to attract a minyan for services. Dr. Galinski explained the absurdities of G.D.R. policies towards the Jews. Their foreign policy was one of those most hostile to the State of Israel. The care for the cemeteries has now been assumed by the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland. It will take time to rebuild Weissensee, the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe. This cemetery contains the graves of many of those who contributed most to the achievements of the Jews in Germany. Major figures, such as some of the founders of department stores and publishing houses like Tietz and Ullstein, are buried in Weissensee. Their enterprises have been taken over by gentiles but often continue under the old names. Dr. Galinski expressed his frustration about his inability to convince the present owners of these establishments to accept the moral and financial obligations to at least care for the dead.

Rabbi Lehman expressed the gratitude of the group to Dr. Galinski and wished our two guests a successful meeting and a safe return home.

The reception was concluded at 7:00 p.m.

End of [Minutes of the meeting of the officers of the American Federation].